DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 831 CS 012 235

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TITLE 180 Days in Second Grade: Knowing and Growing Together.
PUB DATE Sep 95
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT NRRC News: A Newsletter of the National Reading Research Center; p1-3 Sep 1995

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Childrens Literature; *Grade 2; Journal Writing; Literature Appreciation; Primary Education; Reading Attitudes; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Writing Relationship; *Student Attitudes; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching (Occupation); Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Teaching Experiment; Teaching Research

ABSTRACT

A university reading educator exchanged jobs with an elementary school teacher for a full year of teaching and research in a second-grade classroom. The educator's perspective on teaching and learning literacy was based on the 3-part principle that immersion in a rich literate environment, explicit teacher instruction in literacy skills and strategies, and daily massed practice in literate activities are essential for success in reading, writing, and oracy. During the school year, the children grew in their knowledge and appreciation of children's literature. Students' interest and enjoyment of books were evident in their spontaneous writing, and they demonstrated their growing knowledge of authors in their journals. Children's writing ability grew in concert with their reading, and they demonstrated strategic reading development in various daily reading tasks and in a series of one-to-one interviews. Students also demonstrated growth as readers through an informal reading inventory. By the end of the year, the university educator was more in touch with the realities of day-to-day teaching and realized he had just begun to learn again what it means to teach. (RS)

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A Newsletter of the National Reading Research Center

NRRC is a consortium of the University of Georgia and University of Maryland College Park

September 1995

ED 385 831

180 Days in Second Grade: Knowing and Growing Together

James F. Baumann, NRRC, University of Georgia

8-19-94 (First day of school)
Well, it's finally arrived. What a day. I remember being this tired, but it's been about 17 years since I felt this way.... I believe I entered this whole experience with a healthy amount of humility, and I can administer myself another dose now.... We had a good day; I believe the kids left for home feeling good about school and themselves (I hope so). I was a bit more ambivalent, feeling that I was not as successful as I could/should have been. But, I need to be reasonable with myself—I will NOT be the perfect 2nd grade teacher ever, let alone after a single year. And, I truly have limits and foibles as evidenced by the first day snafus (e.g., a math matrix activity that blew the kids away). What I need to do is to recognize that I am learning; keep a good attitude about myself and my teaching; expect failures along with the successes; but keep on smiling, finding the humor, and plugging away.... At least it's finally here and happening. The long anticipation is over thank goodness.

This is an excerpt from my teaching journal following the first day of school, the first day of second grade for my students at Fowler Drive Elementary School in Athens, Georgia, and my first day of full-time teaching since I left the elementary classroom in 1977. Thus began a year's worth of incredible learning for me and my students. One hundred eighty days of work and fun, successes and failures, laughs and tears had begun.

My 1994-1995 school year experience came about as a result of a job exchange between Betty Shockley and me. Betty, a first-grade teacher for 11 years at Fowler Drive, took leave from the Clarke County Schools to return to graduate school at the University of Georgia, teaching undergraduate courses in my absence and continuing to administer the NRRC's School Research Consortium (Baumann, Allen, & Shockley, 1994). Conversely, I took a leave from my duties in the Department of Reading Education and the NRRC at the University to assume a classroom teacher opening at Fowler Drive due to Betty's absence. My position involved all the duties and responsibilities of a regular, full-time elementary classroom teacher, from 7:20 a.m. bus duty to after-school meetings and PTO. I was a classroom teacher in every sense, like everyone else at Fowler Drive.

My preparation for teaching began in the summer of 1993, with discussions with school district personnel followed by various logistical tasks (e.g., I had to take a graduate course in exceptional children and pass the state-required Teacher Certification Test to obtain a Georgia Teaching License). In May 1994, I learned that I would be teaching second grade, and I spent several days observing my second-graders-to-be in their first-grade classrooms at Fowler. That summer I planned my curriculum, collected instructional materials, and worked to prepare my classroom.

During my year in second grade, I was a teacher and a researcher, the former involving the obvious responsibility to provide my 7- and 8-year-old students the best learning experience possible, and the latter involving two projects supported by the NRRC. One study was a self-examination of the impact returning to teach had on me as a classroom teacher, a college instructor, and a researcher and writer. The second study explored my yearlong attempt to integrate reading strategy instruction in word identification and comprehension into a literature-based framework. I cannot go into all the details of both of these studies within this brief article. Instead, I will present my overall philosophy toward teaching and learning and how it was implemented in my classroom, describe some of the ways my students came to learn and grow throughout the school year, and share some of my initial reflections on this enriching experience.

Philosophy and Implementation. My perspective on teaching and learning literacy was based upon the three-part principle that immersion in a rich literate environment, explicit teacher instruction in literacy skills and strategies, and daily massed practice in literate activities are essential for success in reading, writing, and oracy. I implemented this philosophy through a series of daily or regular routines (Baumann, in press) that included: (a) talking and oral sharing (e.g., at a daily "Class Meeting" time); (b) reading and writing sharing (e.g., during "Reader's/Writer's Chair" time); (c) reading numerous picture and chapter books to the children in multiple contexts; (d) individual and interactive reading practice times (e.g., during our daily DEAR—**D**rop **E**verything **A**nd **R**ead—time); (e) an intensive, daily reading strategy instruction period; (f) regular process writing periods; (g) a weekly "Reading/Writing Buddies" period in which my students read and wrote with fifth-grade partners; (h) spelling and handwriting lessons, which were often integrated into writing or content subjects; (i) and various home-school literacy activities (e.g., children taking home the stuffed "Leo the Read-With-Me-Lion" to share a favorite book with parents, care givers, or siblings). In short, our days were filled with books, writing, literature, and talk about each.

Learning and Growing. One way in which the children grew was in their knowledge and appreciation of children's literature. I read hundreds of picture books to the children, and we studied various picture book artists (e.g., E. J. Keats, D. Crews, E. Carle, J. Marshall, T. dePaola, M. Brown, A. Lobel) and featured other collections of books (e.g., "Pig Books," "ABC Books," "Halloween Books," "Books about Planets," "Books about Plants"). I also read more than 20 chapter books to the children (e.g., titles by B. Cleary, M. Stolz/P. Cummings, R. Dahl, and biographies about Martin Luther King, Jr., and Harriet Tubman). I did book talks regularly, and sometimes the kids did the book talks themselves. For example, during a Class Meeting in April, I introduced books by Frank Asch, our new featured artist. When I held up a few Asch titles and began to discuss

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them, Danielle beat me to the punch saying, "...Frank Asch... He's a neat author, and you're probably familiar with one of his famous books. It's called *Mooncake*. I bet some of you have seen this or heard this." At this point, Tom interjected, "Ohhh, I got a book about the moon having a birthday" [*Happy Birthday, Moon*]. This kind of interchange demonstrated the children's increasing awareness of book authors and artists, and they were always eager to share their knowledge.

The students' interest and enjoyment of books were evident in their spontaneous writing. For example, one day in October during our writing period, Trellis decided to comment on *The Greyling*, the beautiful and charming Jane Yolen/David Ray picture book that I had read to the class earlier that day at our Class Meeting (see Trellis's reproduced story). Similarly, in a piece titled "I Like Books" that was included in a published class book titled *January Stories*, Danielle wrote: "Hi! My name is Danielle. Well, if you like to read, here is a great book! The name of it is *Green Eggs and Ham*...."

The Greyling

by Trellis

Dear Mr. Baumann,

The book that you read was good. I really like that book. I really do like it when she got the little baby. The baby was cute.

As part of our daily, after-lunch DEAR Time, the children had opportunities to write in their Reading Response Journals, which provided further evidence of their developing breadth of knowledge of books, as well as their growing appreciation of literature. For example, on January 20, Lashay wrote: "Today I read *Clifford's Puppy Days*. I love that book so much. Read that book and you will like it to. It is a good book and I love books." The children expressed various feelings about what they read. For instance, in a November entry, Victoria wrote: "Today I read a book called *What Mary Jo Shared*. I like the book. It is fun, but there is a little bit of sad part in it. The sad part is when the teacher asked her do you have something to share, and she would shake her head...."

Students demonstrated their growing knowledge of authors in their journals. On November 11, Latoya commented on a number of Marc Brown books: "Today I read *Arthur's BABY*. I [like] the books about Arthur. Some remind me of *Arthur Goes to Camp* and *Arthur's Halloween* and *Arthur's Eyes*...." The children also enjoyed reading their own writing. On September 30, Cassandra wrote: "Today I read *Class Stories II* [one of our bound, published class books]. It was a nice story. I liked it a lot. I like Tom's story. His is a nice story. It's about a smooth car...."

Journal entries were also interactive and revealing of children's school and home literacy experiences. For instance, in a November entry, Victoria wrote about *Monkey See, Monkey Do*, commenting "...You will love this story if you get a good time to read it. I like that story. Do you?", to which I wrote back, "I don't think I've read this book, Victoria, but I'll have to check it out! Mr. B." Latoya's fifth-grade reading buddy also saw her growing in sophistication as a reader, writing in Latoya's journal, "Latoya can really read very good. I enjoy reading with her. Love, Trahlyta." In January, Antivous commented on reading he did at home with his mother: "...I read to my mom.... I like the story when my mom reads to me.... My mom got a good voice. I love her reading." For Antivous, as for many others in our class, reading and book sharing were natural, regular parts of both the school and home environments.

The children's writing ability grew in concert with their reading. Their stories were topical and personal, writing about friends, family, and home- and school-related events. For example, on October 11, in a story titled "The Birthday," Jodi wrote: "Today I had a birthday. The teacher gave me a party and a present on my birthday. It is today. It was fun. Very very fun. I am 7 years old today!" Shaquilla lamented the death of pets in "My Dog and Cat," when in *Class Stories II* she wrote, "My dog and my cat is dead. It made me cry. It is sad to me. But I still have one of my cats, and I have six dogs." Persistent, personal interests also fueled compositions, such as Chad's yearlong fascination with insects, which resulted in compositions in September and April (see Chad's reproduced story).

Students demonstrated strategic reading development in various daily reading tasks and in a series of one-to-one interviews; it was exciting to see the fruits of our work on reading strategy development as the students puzzled out words and the meanings of texts. For example, on May 17, Gay Ivey, a doctoral student at the University who was assisting me in data collection, was reading with Kendra and inquired about a self-correction Kendra made, asking "Why did you change your mind?" Kendra responded by describing her monitoring/self-correction rereading strategy: "Because I knew it didn't make sense, and I went back and said it again." Trellis relayed a similar meaning-seeking strategy when describing

how he dealt with an unfamiliar word: "I go back and read it over, and I know what the word is." [Gay asks, "What makes you go back and decide to read it over?"] "No, see, I'll read it, and then I'll skip that word, and then when I get to the last word, I'll know what that word means." Deveon revealed his developing decoding skill after substituting *second* for *slowly* in the sentence "Toad swam slowly" in *Frog and Toad are Friends*: [Deveon subvocalizes "second"] "It don't got a *k*." [Gay asks what the second letter is.] "*L*." [Deveon begins substituting possible words]"...shower...sow...sale...slip...slow...Toad swam *slowly*!" Social aspects of literacy were also evident in the interviews. For example, when Gay asked Tom how he learned about the book *Ten Silly Bears*, he said, "My friend Trellis, he found it, and he read it, and I read it.... We were buddy reading." This kind of social learning was a function of the opportunities children had to read and write with and to one another.

My Caterpillar

by Chad

My Dad told me that we could keep the caterpillar. The caterpillar spin and spin and spin until the caterpillar turned into a cocoon. I saw a wing come out of the cocoon. It was a butterfly. It came out of its cocoon. It flew away up into the sky. Up in the high sky.

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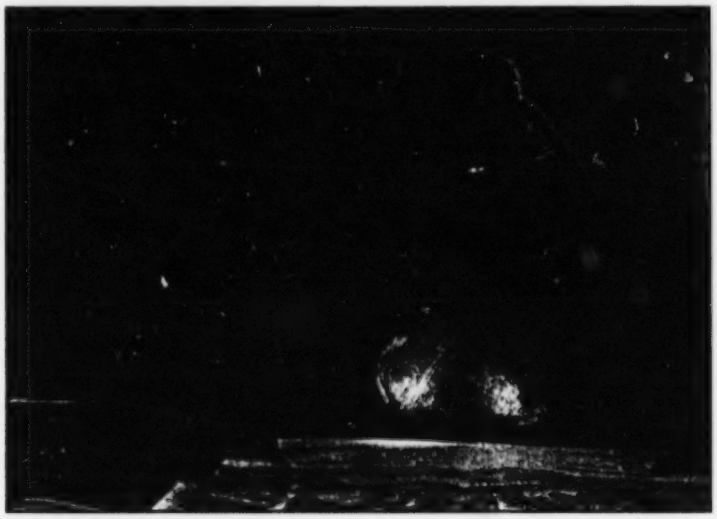
Students also demonstrated growth as readers through an informal reading inventory (IRI) that I administered three times, using separate forms in August, January, and May. Students' reading levels in August were modest at best, with 6 of the 16 students in my class at the beginning of the year being virtual non-readers or with instructional levels of preprimer. Of the remaining 10 students, most were reading at a first-grade level with none reading above second-grade. The January IRI administration revealed growth for most students, and the May IRI results showed significant development of reading ability. Of the 13 students who remained in my class throughout the entire school year (6 students moved in and out at different points in the year), May IRIs revealed that 5 students were reading at the fourth-grade level or above, 3 at the third-grade level, 3 at the second-grade level, and 2 at the first-grade level. In other words, 9 children advanced at least two grade levels on IRIs, and the remaining 4 students grew 1 to 1.5 years, with an overall class average of 1.7 grade levels of growth across the school year. This growth was indicative of the children's hard work during our daily reading strategies period and the tremendous amount of time they practiced reading at school and at home.



Reflections. My reflections on a year in second grade are many and varied (Baumann, in press). Teaching remains the hardest but most rewarding work I have ever done. The highs and lows, joys and sorrows are dramatic and unexpected. My students and I shared happiness, sadness, wishes, successes, hopes, and frustrations. We laughed often, cried on occasion, and always worked hard. We became a family—though not always a happy and placid one—but we came to trust and respect, if not love, one another. The year passed quickly, with the end sudden and almost rudely abrupt. During a reading/writing time on the last day of school, I stole a few moments and wrote the following:

6-2-95 (Last day of school)
Weird. The last everything. Sad and difficult. Taking final photos; final Class Meeting; final read alouds; final writing time; final reading time—a wonderful time that's going on as I write. All the kids focused on books and literacy. Oh, how far we've come, really, in skill, attitude, habit, maturity. Tom's sitting writing about Green Eggs and Ham*; Lashay just came up to share her writing with me and asked for help with a word. Everyone engaged in books. This I'll miss, really miss. 180 days of teaching is fast, too fast....*

I'm a different person for my year in second grade. I'm more in touch with the realities of day-to-day teaching and, I hope, wiser for the experience. If my students learned half as much as I, then we all had a good year. But one year is not enough. I've just begun to learn again what it means to teach. I'm already thinking about when I can do this again.

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